

The SCAnner

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The Characteristics What comes next? Richard K (LA)

The Twelve Suggested Steps of SCA

1. We admitted we were powerless over sexual compulsion - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood God*.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood God*, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to sexually compulsive people and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

The Twelve Traditions of SCA

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon SCA unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one authority - a loving God as may be expressed in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for SCA membership is a desire to stop having compulsive sex.
4. Each group should be autonomous, except in matters affecting other groups or SCA as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose -- to carry its message to the sexual compulsive who still suffers.
6. An SCA group ought never endorse, finance or lend the SCA name to any outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every SCA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Sexual Compulsives Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. SCA, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. SCA has no opinion on outside issues; hence the SCA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, television and films.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.



SCA Calendar

Items are from various Intergroups and the International Service Organization. Please call the local Intergroup to see if plans have changed.

You may submit items for the SCA Calendar by e-mail to info@sca-recovery.org or by regular mail to: SCA P.O. Box 1585, Old Chelsea Station New York, NY 10011

Special events

Memorial Day Weekend, 2000 -- Los Angeles retreat
July 21-23, 2000 -- Chicago Summer Retreat
August 4-6, 2000 -- New York Retreat, Pawling, NY
Labor Day Weekend, 2000 -- Los Angeles retreat
Fall 2000 -- Chicago Conference (tentative)
December 2000 -- New York holiday party (tentative)
New Year's, 2000-2001 -- Los Angeles retreat
January 26-28, 2001 New York retreat (tentative)
February, 2001 -- Los Angeles Conference (Presidents' Day Weekend)
Spring 2001 -- New York Conference (tentative)

Regular Intergroup meetings

Chicago First Sunday
Los Angeles -- Third Sunday
Milwaukee -- First Sunday
New York-- Third Sunday
St. Louis-- Second Monday
San Diego -- Last Sunday
Washington -- Second Thursday

ISO Officers 2000

Chair Frank T, Chicago
Secretary Frank H, New York
Treasurer Brian B, San Francisco/Vermont

National Coordinator Michael R, Los Angeles

Literature Development Joe F, New York
Literature Distribution Paul N, Milwaukee
SCAnner Editor David A-S, New York
800 number Todd R, Chicago
Electronic Communications Rod F, Washington DC

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Editor's Note

Welcome to another issue of the SCAnner. This issue features a report on the ISO Conference held in Chicago in February 2000, (p4) a report on the first Chicago/Mid West Conference, and a report on the Annual New York Conference (p6). John C from NJ shares his strength hope and experience in My Story (7). From the Archives of the very first SCAnner Editor Richard K (LA) I managed to rescue two articles, one a collection of members' reflections on Recovery (p8) and the other, some reflections on the Characteristics (p26) and beyond.

This issue is devoted to the 14 Characteristics. The 14 Characteristics have not been written about at all in any of our literature, yet they represent one of the corner stones of our fellowship. These writing on the Characteristics are not finite by any means, so much more can and hopefully will be written about this seminal aspect of our program, but they certainly are as a very exciting beginning.

This of the SCAnner commemorates 10 years of the SCAnner. The first issue of the SCAnner came out on February 9, 1990. Due to circumstances beyond my control, the issue scheduled to come out at this time commemorating the 10th Anniversary has had to be delayed till the end of this year. It will be a very exciting issue featuring interviews with founding members from around the country recounting how SCA began in their city. It is an issue not to be missed. In the meantime, please enjoy reading about the Characteristics.

You can also find the SCAnner on the Web at: <http://www.sca-recovery.org/scanner>

Yours in Recovery,
 David A-S Editor

**The Serenity Prayer**

*God grant me the Serenity to accept the things I can not change,
 Courage to change the things I can, and Wisdom to know the difference*

SCA ISO CONFERENCE

John F.(NY)

The SCA ISO Conference took place in Chicago, Illinois from February 25 to February 27, 2000. Ninety-five meetings were represented out of 147 worldwide. Present in Chicago were representatives from LA, New York, Chicago, Milwaukee, Phoenix, Washington DC, San Francisco and San Diego.

Literature

A formal literature approval process was adopted and a new position Literature Development Coordinator was created. "Measuring and Celebrating Progress" was put out as literature in draft form, and that in 2001 will be voted up or down in its current form with only minor revisions. The SCA Book was delegated to the Literature Development Coordinator and it was suggested that a piece on the Characteristics might serve as a starting point. Corrections on "What About Masturbation?" were submitted to the Literature Development Coordinator for final feedback and suggestions.

Credit Card Transactions

The use of credit cards to buy literature on the SCA Web site was approved.

Up-coming expenses

A balanced budget was accepted. There are major future expenses in the works, Reprinting the Little Blue Book. The original printing cost several thousand dollars, and a reprinting would exceed our entire annual budget. Our stock will run out in the next year or so.

Inter Fellowship Forum

ISO agreed to sponsor the Inter-Fellowship Forum every fifth year, starting in 2001, and to present itself at the parole and probation officers' national convention next year presuming that the costs do not exceed \$200, and in conjunction with other "S" fellowships if they are participating.

Election of Officers

The Position of Vice Chair was eliminated

Chair, Frank T, Chicago, term expires 2001

Secretary, Frank H, New York, term expires 2002

Treasurer, Brian B, San Francisco/Vermont, term expires 2001

National Coordinator, Michael R, Los Angeles, term expires 2001

Literature Distribution, Paul N, Milwaukee, , term expires 2001

Literature Development, Joe F, New York, term expires 2002

SCAnner Editor, David A-S, New York, term expires 2001

800 number, Todd R, Chicago, term expires 2002

Electronic Communications, Rod F, Washington, term expires 2002

The 2001 ISO meeting will be held in San Diego. The 2002 meeting will be held in Phoenix if feasible; with St. Louis as a backup site, with a final decision next year.

2000 Proposed Budget

| | |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| INCOME | |
| 7th Tradition | \$4,000.00 |
| Donations | |
| Literature-Sale | \$6,500.00 |
| Scanner-Sale | |
| TOTAL INCOME | \$10,500.00 |

| | |
|------------------------------------|------------|
| EXPENSES | |
| Literature | \$4,000.00 |
| --reprint Q & A | \$400.00 |
| --reprint some piece | \$500.00 |
| --transaction fees for credit card | \$350.00 |
| --postage \$750.00 | |
| --reserve for reprinting Blue Book | \$2,000.00 |
| Phone | \$2,360.00 |
| --800 # | \$1,800.00 |
| --voice mail | \$260.00 |
| --add Spanish to voicemail | \$300.00 |
| ISO Meeting | \$1,550.00 |
| --meeting space | \$900.00 |
| --travel | \$250.00 |
| --printing & postage | \$400.00 |
| Scanner --print | \$500.00 |
| IF Meeting | \$500.00 |
| #NAME? | \$250.00 |
| --other travel | \$250.00 |
| 800 Coordinator | \$400.00 |
| --phone | \$200.00 |
| --postage | \$200.00 |
| Website | \$260.00 |
| --registration | \$35.00 |
| --rent server space | \$225.00 |
| Bank Charges | \$200.00 |
| --service charge | \$180.00 |
| --other (bounced checks) | \$20.00 |
| National Coordinator | \$50.00 |
| --supplies | \$25.00 |
| --postage | \$25.00 |
| Treasurer --postage | \$30.00 |
| One-time Expenses | \$950.00 |
| --IRS registration | \$150.00 |
| --initiating credit card sales | \$500.00 |
| --prison outreach convention | \$200.00 |
| --mail archives | \$100.00 |

| | |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| TOTAL EXPENSES | \$10,800.00 |
|-----------------------|--------------------|

Conference Reports

Chicago Midwest Conference October 23 and 24 1999

The First Chicago Midwest Conference took place on October 23 and 24 at the Student Union Building at the University of Illinois Medical School. Members from Chicago, Milwaukee and St Louis gave workshops. Bill L one of the founders of SCA in New York and Jim M one of the founders of SCA in St Louis spoke at the opening meeting.

There were three simultaneous workshops and sessions over a day and a half. One room was set aside for an on-going "S" meeting and was open to all "S" meetings in Chicago. Workshop topics included Meditation, Sponsorship, Dating and Relationships, Step 9, Step 4, I Can't Stay Sober and Stay the Same & I Can't Stay the Same and Stay Sober.

27 people attended the Conference. It is not clear at this stage if there will be another one. The most difficult part was getting a place to have the conference. The university building was ideal with large rooms, break out rooms, parking and easily accessible. The conference did not make any money. In fact it lost \$200, but there were sufficient funds to cover the costs.

New York SCA Conference, May 19-21

The 15th Annual SCA New York Conference took place the weekend before Memorial Day Weekend at the Gay and Lesbian Community Center Swing Space on Little West 12th Street. It was a cold and wet weekend in New York but that didn't stop the crowds from attending. The opening meeting focused on the Founding Fathers of SCA. Founding Members Bill L, Frank H and Saul M spoke about the beginnings of SCA to a capacity filled auditorium. The three speakers were subsequently presented with plaques of appreciation for their efforts in establishing what is today SCA worldwide. A call for donations was made to erect a permanent plaque to the Founding Members of SCA in the renovated Gay and Lesbian Center when that re-opens hopefully later this year. By the end of the weekend, enough money was raised to erect the permanent plaque.

This year's conference was titled On the Road: Reclaiming Our Selves in Recovery. It had four tracks: Finding directions, Starting your Engine, On the Road and Seeing the World. Among the workshops there were such things as: Setting and Maintaining Boundaries, All about Dating, Don't Call it Friendship (all about relationships within program), Self Esteem the Real Thing, Wholly Sex!, Home Cooking: Sex in a Committed Relationship. This conference also features the first workshop in Spanish.

On Sunday night the Conference Show was a reworking of Grease and called Grace. It featured some wonderful cameo appearances by Sponsor Barbara S (Jeff) who did an unforgettable rendition of People Who Need People.

MY STORY

John C (NJ)

When the pain of my addictive cycle and isolation was greater than the fear of being rejected and judged, I reached out about my sexual and romantic patterns to a person who, at that point, had become a most trusted friend. This person was the first friend I had made who was in active recovery, or the first person in active recovery from whom I learned of recovery, and it was she who let me know about this program. I was experiencing a whirlpool of destructive behavior. I describe this as a pattern alternating viciously from feeling so unlovable and seeking approval from anyone and everyone to being so frightened by my ever more dangerous promiscuity that I was desperate to find a "special" someone to take me away from my insane behavior. Outside of a relationship, I felt empty and incomplete. Incomplete because I couldn't live with myself as I had such little tolerance for dealing with life on life's terms, either when it was wonderful or difficult. Empty because my life was a sham. I was an image I presented to those around me as I felt I "should" be. I hated myself for the terrifying difference between the person I was and the person I wanted myself to be. To the words "outside a relationship I felt empty and incomplete" I feel compelled to add the word "lonely". I was lonely because I didn't know how to be by myself, because I didn't want to be by myself. Secretly, I believed no one would really want to be with me if they really knew what I was about. I was lonely by myself, and lonely with everyone I was with both when I was acting out and when I wasn't. No one knew who I was, because I was afraid of the world.

I feared relationships, but continually searched for one. In all my relationships, I feared abandonment and rejection. Fear seems to be the operative word behind all my interactions prior to recovery. As a survivor of incest, I had the textbook "damaged goods" syndrome. At first I felt I was beyond acceptance because I was attracted to people of the same sex. Obviously, other boys must have had feelings similar to mine that went beyond the physical acts that went along with the sexual attraction, but to me it seemed as if I was the only one who had these feelings. All my acting out as a child was about trying to get boys to be sexual with me in the middle of the night during a sleepover, and the few times it wasn't about a dream-like interruption to sleep, the acting out was completely characterized by lack of communication. The one time someone tried to talk to me about having sex with him, I froze up and couldn't talk about it. I can distinctly remember the point in my life when I came to terms with the fact that I couldn't change my feelings of attraction towards other men. I had, up to that point, tried and tried to change, and then my sexuality, to me, became a secret I was going to take with me to the grave. By college, when I learned a little more about homosexuality, I still felt the terror of abandonment and rejection. I began to make gay friends but would not allow myself to get too close to anyone because of how "sick" I judged myself to be, due to my judgement of my childhood and my lack of self-esteem. As I attempted to have "relationships" I was terrified of opening up and of having sex. For a long time, anonymous sex was "better" than sex with people I was dating. It has taken me years in recovery and therapy to be able to link the word "fear" with that reality.

Not surprisingly to me, it has been the "laboratory" of the "halls" or the "rooms" of recovery that has, ever so slowly, taught me to act "through" or "beyond" my fears, as opposed to acting them out. My recovery has taught me to stop judging myself so, to be less "moral" and more honest and true to myself and to all people with whom it seems appropriate to be honest. I am still a "work in progress", "under construction" you may say, as I continue to catch myself judging myself and others. But my relationships in program, particularly sponsor relationships, have helped me learn that I am completely lovable exactly as I am. I am learning to get out of the judgements of my past and the wish lists for the future and keep the focus on the present. I am comforted when I hear people saying that all any of us have for today is today. I no longer have secrets I feel I need to keep from the world. Recovery has been the one place I could learn to be myself with others.

Today, I find myself in a "relationship", and as with all my relationships in recovery, I choose to be honest one day at a time with my partner. This has proven harder to me than it sounds. In recovery, I tell myself to focus on the present, while the old patterns continue to push me into fantasies and fears about the future. I work on accepting myself as the imperfect but lovable child of God that I am, and more importantly, I allow myself to accept that my partner can love me as well. I try to accept him as he is, which has been a pattern of struggle for me in the past, due to my character defect of perfectionism. Every day of sobriety is a blessing to me when I stop to think about it, and so is this relationship. My recovery has helped me let go of my fears of relationships, to learn how to have them, and to focus on my recovery and not on relationships. All these lessons most definitely are a gift from a Power greater than myself and as I allow it to happen, are restoring me to sanity one day at a time.

Recovery is.....

Assembled by Richard K (LA)

Many of our members have voiced their feelings about recovery and what it means to them, at retreats, at meetings, and at fellowship after meetings. Here are some of their thought and feelings

Recovery is...

...building up trust, sitting back and listening to others' stories at meetings, then letting out our feelings and our stories and our hurts a little at a time, experiencing the positive feedback and love of those around us...

...letting go of our shame by openly discussing our problems and our hidden history with those around us who understand...

...being gentle with ourselves, we've beat ourselves up enough in our lives; we need to know we're OK where we are at the moment and just do the very best we can for today...

...picking up the phone rather than acting out, beginning to break the isolation which feeds our dis-ease...

...sharing our feelings and problems with others, a shared problem is a solved problem...

...knowing we have a choice in each and every thing we do, always, and taking full responsibility for the outcome of each choice we make...

...living in today, this moment, rather than in the expectations of the future; no expectations means no disappointments...

...seeing the spiritual in a person, rather than, or in addition to the physical...

...knowing we are NEVER alone, even when we are by ourselves....

...being honest, with God, with ourselves, with our significant others and with each and every one we come in contact with...

...being willing to be willing, willing to listen, to be there for someone, to come to meetings when we don't want to, to evaluate our choices, to postpone acting out until another time, to love ourselves...

...forgiving ourselves when we get caught up in obsessions, or ogling a sharp number a little too long, a little too hungrily, or even for acting out...

...singing familiar, happy songs at the top of our voices while walking through the hills with a group of friends and not feeling ashamed...

...being of service to the Fellowship and to the community, in small ways and in larger ways...

...being able to talk to a person about the obsessions or fantasies we have about them, face to face, openly, honesty, without acting on them, and experiencing the freeing "defusing" of a compulsion...

...sitting on the top of a hill when the sun is rising and feeling the tears well up in our eyes and thanking God for all the beauty around us...

...being totally free to laugh and to cry and to laugh again, openly, without fear or shame, at a meeting, over the phone, with a friend...

...getting in touch with our bodies, not just our genitals, but our whole selves, lovingly caressing ourselves all over, realizing just how beautiful our bodies are...

...letting go, a little at a time, of being in control, being critical and manipulative, being judgmental; allowing room in our consciousness for compassion, acceptance, respect and love, for all those around us, and, so importantly, for ourselves...

...loving ourselves, knowing that we are really so very worthwhile.



Characteristic 1

As adolescents, we used fantasy and compulsive masturbation to avoid feelings, and continued this tendency into our adult lives with compulsive sex

Aaron Y (NY)

Compulsive masturbation was absolutely the beginning of my problems with compulsive behavior, and it started even before puberty for me. My older brother discovered my father's cache of pornography and told me about it, so that even before I was fully developed sexually (I was probably 12 or 13) I was exposed to these incredibly potent sexual images (only some of it was hard core, but that was enough). It was also at that time when I realized that I was spending a lot more of the time looking at the guys than the girls, though both turned me on.

Well, I was off and running. I was always masturbating. Whereas up to that point I used to read lots of books, suddenly I was gobbling up these magazines. And, importantly, all of this activity was extremely furtive and filled with tension, because I had always to be ready on a second's notice to put back these magazines exactly as they were if I heard someone coming home.

This also became, I think, my way of misbehaving and rebelling and just generally zoning out. I was always, always well behaved, cheery, the model student, the popular guy, the teacher's pet. But I must have been tense, sad, and angry at times in ways I wanted to express. But with a few rare exceptions, I don't really remember lots of really strong emotions, or at least expressing them to or at others. But I do remember masturbating endlessly. It was absolutely a way to get out of myself, to take a break from whatever pressures I did have. And because my mind was so full with these pornographic images of people I didn't know, I was almost always fantasizing about unobtainable people (and their assorted delectable body parts, of course!).

This pattern continued once I left home for college, first just with masturbation. I remember that at the end of semester in college, and later in grad school, when I had the enormous pressure of exams and papers due, that my masturbation was out of control. I would do it again and again and again, and it was absolutely a way of escaping from the pressure and the tension I was feeling. Later on, when I had my first job in New York and I had graduated on to bigger and better things, long, pressure-filled weeks would be punctuated by late-night visits to peep booths, no matter how much else I had to do. Alternately, I would whip out my scraps of paper with names and numbers scribbled on them, try to remember who these tricks were and whether I'd had a good time, and dial away until I found someone ready, willing and able, as they say.

I don't want this testimony to be entirely negative. I absolutely still have problems with using masturbation and sex to avoid feelings. But I've made a lot of progress. For me, acknowledging, describing and beginning to understand a problem is the beginning of dealing with it. Now, for one, I admit I have a problem with this. Second, I know how to

describe and recognize it, so that when it's starting to happen, it is happening, or has just happened, I can spot it. If I'm lucky and vigilant, I can even see the behaviors or conditions that are leading to it (HALT, high pressure, etc), and maybe even take some steps to avoid it, diminish it, stop it. Sometimes I can, some times I can't. But that's still much better than before, when I wasn't even aware of the depth of the problem. And with a handful of exceptions, since I entered SCA two-and-half years ago, at least I don't end up in the filthy theaters and bookstores that produced so much shame; my acting out is at least less self-loathing and self-destructive. Finally, I need to recognize that I need to look for progress, not perfection, and that this takes time. For over 20 years I've been compulsive sexually, so these patterns run deep. Patience is not something most addicts have a lot of, including me, but I need to recognize that I'm still really just starting out on the road to recovery.

Characteristic 2

Compulsive sex became a drug which we used to escape from feelings such as anxiety, loneliness, anger and self-hatred, as well as joy
UT (NY)

I was not fully aware, until I came to SCA, how I had slowly come to use compulsive sex as a drug and that sex had replaced my former dependence on alcohol as my "escape of choice". It took coming to meetings and listening to other sex addicts struggling with sexual compulsion to understand the full implications of the second characteristic.

Prior to my first meeting, I thought that I was just "having fun", that after many years spent in two consecutive monogamous relationships, I was finally sowing my "wild oats", not realizing that I was merely avoiding feelings by acting out my compulsion. My sponsor in another twelve step program pointed out to me (more than once) that my sexual behavior was out of control. Finally, I began to grasp that I had traded one addiction for another, and in fact that my sexual compulsion might have always been at the root of all of my addictions.

When I came to SCA, I didn't think the behavior that I was engaging in at the time was so terrible. I was "dating" three different men, none of whom knew of each other, acting out in video booths three or four times a week, going to a bath house a couple of times a month and picking people up on the street whenever possible.

I was working very, very hard not to feel the feelings that had surfaced in the three years that I'd been sober from drugs and alcohol. For many years I had sustained relationships and though I can now see that I acted out within them sexually, at the time my preferred method of escape was alcohol and drugs. But once I put those down, and also ended my relationship with my lover, I found myself quickly in the grips of almost daily sexual acting out. Obviously it didn't work for long. The pain of living that way while trying to apply the principles of a twelve step program "to all of my affairs" and attempting to establish a conscious contact with a higher power became unbearable, and fortunately SCA was there to help me pick up the pieces.

The second characteristic is important to me because it implies that my sexual "acting out" behavior is a compulsion, a "dis-ease" as it were, which continues to tell me that I don't have to feel, that I can numb myself and escape the difficulties of life through sex. The first key to awareness, acceptance and action for me was coming to meetings. The second, continuing to look at my behavior and committing to recovery.

The urge to act out sexually is still with me unfortunately, sometimes stronger, sometimes weaker. I find that if I talk about it with other addicts and sexual compulsives in meetings and in fellowship, I have a chance at sobriety. On my own, I will be led right back into acting out the way I did almost three years ago when I first came to SCA.

Now I find that different feelings come up for me and that I continue to find ever more creative ways to suppress them whether it be flirting on a subway, using wet areas of my gym or the now so popular Internet chat areas. Continuing to look at the second characteristic and applying the tools of the program to these new trouble spots helps me stay sober one day at a time.

Characteristic 3

We tended to become immobilized by romantic obsessions. We became addicted to the search for sex and love; as a result we neglected our lives.

Jeff Z (NY)

When I decided to write about Characteristic 3, I joked with the editor of this publication that "I would probably be late submitting my article because I'd be immobilized by a Romantic Obsession!" We laughed about this possibility and I promptly forgot about it. Now, at least thirty days past our agreed upon deadline, it's hard for me to share that I've been struggling with an RO (Romantic Obsession) once again, one that surfaced quite unexpectedly. More accurately, I've been trying to NOT go into full-tilt RO mode in hopes that I might actually learn why it is I have obsessions in the first place and also salvage a friendship with someone who I have come to know and dearly love. So it has been in this struggle that I've gotten acquainted with that part of myself that goes bonkers in emotionally intimate relationships. I call it THE LOVE MONSTER.

But before I discuss THE LOVE MONSTER, I need to share a little history about my relationship with my friend who also happens to be in this program. We met innocently enough about a year ago at the train station after a Sunday night meeting. We had seen each other at the meeting and he approached me in a sincere and friendly way. As we chatted, I learned that we had a lot in common with our respective addictions. He was a newcomer at the time and I felt honored that he respected the nearly six years I had invested in recovery related work. I have to admit that when I meet a prospective RO, I usually have it all plotted out in my little mind where I think things should go from the minute I meet the person. It felt great to meet someone with whom I felt a genuine kinship with who I had no crazy attraction to. I mean NONE, especially not a sexual / romantic one. Besides, he was in the middle of a very difficult relationship and I have a pretty strict rule about getting involved in love affairs with people who are in relationships: I don't.

So, things progressed as they will with good friendships. We started spending some time together after meetings and eventually started socializing outside of the rooms and, for the most part, really enjoyed each other's company. Sure, there were a few miscommunications here and there and a disappointment or two along the way, but I felt a healthy bond of friendship developing between two very different individuals. We made a commitment to be honest with each other early on in our friendship and that decision made the bumpy parts a lot easier to navigate. I was starting to feel like I was cured! At last I was capable of a mutually loving and supportive friendship with another gay man without all of the usual craziness that I know I'm capable of. But then he did the unthinkable, he broke up with his boyfriend and to my little confused mind became "available". And that's basically when all hell broke loose and THE LOVE MONSTER came for a visit and tried to destroy everything.

The MONSTER announced itself slowly at first and in subtle ways. I noticed my anxiety level rising when I spent time around my friend, something that I never had problems with in the past. I noticed that I wasn't cleaning my apartment so often and I all but stopped balancing my checkbook. I noticed a vague, overheated quality developing in me during my conversations with him. I noticed myself planning my life around him and his availability. I noticed myself anxiously waiting for his phone calls. I noticed myself dialing *67 so he wouldn't be able to trace that I had called him by dialing *69. I noticed myself thinking I wanted to kiss him. I noticed that I wanted to act out sexually after spending time with him. Then the worst happened: I started having fantasies about him, including sexual ones. Slowly and almost imperceptibly, I was once again inching my way towards complete immobilization and total self-neglect. But this was my friend! Why on earth was this happening?

And now here's where things can start to really get out of hand. If I follow the usual script, the one that requires me to alienate the other person by driving them totally nuts with tons of (unwanted) attention, I would have already been planning vacations, have bought very expensive presents, and have concocted such a ripe fantasy that reality could hardly compare. There's a REASON why they call them Harlequin Romances and I usually get to play the fool. I was (finally) able to see that I was involving another person in my insanity, someone whose friendship I cherished. I was slowly able to collect myself and muster up the courage to do something I never, ever tried to do in the past I asked him if we could talk about it. And he said yes.

I have to admit that this was probably one of the most painful things I've ever had to do in recovery. I asked my friend about a million times if it was OK to talk and he calmly said "You're my friend and you're not alone in this" (I damn well better NOT be alone! We're going to be fighting some monster after all!) He knew me well enough to know that something was upsetting me and felt that our friendship was strong enough to weather any storm. So we talked. I must admit, part of me was relieved and grateful for the opening to just let this stuff out and another part wanted to absolutely murder him. At long last I would have to face up to that aspect of myself that goes on search and destroy missions in just about every intimate relationship I've ever had and really see what the patterns were that I was "acting out" of. And that's when the miracle happened. A few days after we spoke I realized that there is a part of me that is a sad, lonely little boy who always wanted friends and companions his

whole life but wasn't ever allowed to have them. And then I realized that I had been listening to and obeying this scary voice in my head for a long time that basically said "YOU CAN'T LOVE ANYONE BUT ME, NOT EVEN YOURSELF, AND IF YOU EVEN THINK OF IT YOU'LL DIE!" It was THE LOVE MONSTER!!! Then I had the most painfully obvious realization of all: THE LOVE MONSTER was my mother and I had lived in a state of paralyzing fear and self-neglect to appease her needy demands for most of my life. It all started to make sense. OF COURSE I would make up love fantasies, even about people I cared for. I wasn't allowed real connections with anyone else (my father in particular, but that's a whole other topic) so I MADE THEM UP to prove again and again that I wasn't worthy of anyone's love but hers, a love that was never forthcoming anyway. THE LOVE MONSTER usually got the best of things and I have a long, long list of failed relationships to prove this. (I will spare you the list, but I must admit that the other side benefit to all of this is that I have a much greater appreciation of Norman Bates in Psycho. But I digress).

I have to say that the aftermath of confronting this issue head-on has been very difficult and excruciatingly painful. I have had to confront a lifetime of self-imposed loneliness and feel (and cry and cry and cry) my way through it. I have had to admit that loneliness is both the engine and fuel for most of my addictions, especially romantic obsessions. Another layer of the recovery onion has fallen away, and I feel more vulnerable and exposed than I have in ages. The good news is that my friend and I are still friends and this sober action not only salvaged the friendship but deepened our relationship tremendously. I no longer have to live in some insane fear that if I admit that I love him very much (which I really do) that I will die. I honor and respect the gifts as well as the limits of this very intimate relationship. I'm glad that THE LOVE MONSTER is no longer ruling my life. I'm glad that I can genuinely love both myself and this wonderful human being who is my friend. It feels terrific. (Now if I could only stop crying...)

Characteristic 4

We sought oblivion in fantasy and masturbation, and lost ourselves in compulsive sex. Sex became a reward, punishment, distraction and time-killer.
Paul McD (NY)

In Hope and Recovery it says we tried to determine "when we crossed that invisible line". For me, that happened when I discovered masturbation. I took to masturbation and fantasy like a fish to water. In fact, masturbation and fantasy overtook my life very quickly. Early on, it was more of a security blanket that I turned to when I felt anxious or upset. And, with two alcoholic parents, I was anxious and upset most of the time.

They say that sex addiction is a progressive disease and this has certainly been true for me. After eight years of masturbation and fantasy, I added live people to the mix. My first experience took place in a public restroom and I can remember the adrenaline rush like it was yesterday (it was 16 years ago). Deep down I knew and feared that I was not in control of my urges and was completely powerless over my feelings and actions around anonymous sex. The foundation was laid in my early years with masturbation and fantasy.

I did not stop masturbating and fantasizing after I began having compulsive sex with strangers instead it intensified. One provided fuel for the other and it became a vicious cycle. At this point, sex was not pleasurable it became an overused tool to help me deal with life's ups and downs. For instance, getting good grades, a promotion, or not getting them was reason enough to act out. Free time was always my mortal enemy. Even as a child time was scary. Thoughts filled my head if I was not preoccupied with an issue or activity. If I did not act out, I had to spend much of my time thinking of other ways to stay busy in order to avoid my feelings, so acting out was a faster, and quicker solution. In fact, it eventually became automatic, a habitual act. Interestingly, acting out no longer stopped my pain, but instead became the source of my pain.

This is when I found program (or program found me). I simply could not continue that way of life. I had to take some serious action to get control of my sex life. Or so I thought. Ironically, we learn that admitting our powerlessness and lack of control over sexual compulsion is the only way to get a daily reprieve from this horrible disease. I am happy to say that with the help of the program and other sex addicts in recovery, I have been able to stay sober on my plan, one day at a time, for over five years.

Characteristic 5

Because of our low self-esteem we used sex to feel validated and complete.
Paul W (NY)

While considering this characteristic, I realized that I have felt incomplete most of my life. I continue to struggle in recovery with negative tapes that tell me I am not enough, have no value and without the attentions of men I am not alive. Prior to actually seeking and having sex with men I endlessly compared myself, especially to men I was attracted to. As I grew up I felt lonely, isolated, different, in danger, and ultimately like a freak. I was afraid of boys my own age. I learned very early on that I had to hide my difference. Hiding myself is how my shame and low self-esteem began. I began a relentless search for a mirror; someone I could see myself in. I was trying to find out who I was, how to live. I hid myself deeper when I realized that I was attracted physically to men. I feared I would be abandoned or killed if this were found out. My shame and self-loathing grew because of my physical attractions. To explain my difference I turned in upon myself and decided I was bad. The whole world could not be wrong there must be something "not right" about me. I became obsessed with this "not rightness" always looking for ways to fix myself, praying to God to fix me. Because I could not change my insides my "lack of fit" I explained this by attacking my appearance and attributes. Therefore, I was unattractive, poorly dressed and unintelligent. I disparately attempted to shrink my low self-esteem with external solutions. I clung to the belief that if I could just move like him, dress like him, talk like him then I would be "right", I would fit in. Of course no matter what I did, how I changed the outsides, inside I still felt invisible and incomplete.

I first had sex with a man at age thirteen, and ironically, sex saved my life. I felt power, less alone and attractive even desirable. This "power" felt good, to a budding addict, I returned to the same public place the same day to test my power again; and another man wanted me. Slowly I came to realize that I was as replaceable to these men as they were

to me; my denial was long lasting and powerful. I lived on the attention and sex manipulated and demanded out of many men for many years. Nothing lasted although there were times that I attempted relationships. Ultimately it always fell apart because I could not tolerate anyone getting close to what I really thought and felt about myself. I feared I was truly worthless, at the core a bad person. I was increasingly more self-critical and self-centered. I had to act out more to keep feeling powerful and desirable and at the same time my shame and self-loathing grew because of the ways I acting out, how I treated the men I used, and how I was treating myself. I was trapped in a vicious cycle.

Recovery came slowly, first in Al-Anon as I became conscious that I had grown up in a family populated with addicts. I began to see that I, too, was an addict. I felt less shame because I was not alone and the people in the program accepted and loved me as I was recovering my history and myself. I had taken a first step, I begun to let go of hiding. Twelve-step recovery gave me a safe place to essentially become visible in the context of others. Those early days in Al-Anon planted the seeds for my sexual recovery and nurtured my fragile self-esteem. There were other gay men in the Al-Anon rooms and I usually wanted to have sex with them because I felt feelings of friendship towards them. I learned not to act on my sexual feelings by talking about them and not forcing sex. Having a feeling and not taking sexual action, not needing the other person in order to feel whole, was extremely foreign to me. During this time I continued to go to public restrooms and parks to prop up my ego or when I had feelings. What changed was that I became aware of the pattern of my behavior and took the risk to talk about it in meetings. Higher power through the gentle support of people in An-anon, Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous eventually, over six-years, led me to SCA where I have worked on my sobriety and self-esteem for the past nine years a day at a time.

I continue the slow process of developing self-esteem and breaking the sex power/desirability cycle. My sponsor encourages and supports me making "conscious" choices about how I want to express and meet my sexual needs. He gently helps me become conscious about my sexual desires, needs and motives. Gentle consciousness and willingness to make mistakes have decreased the desperation I sometimes feel about not being good enough. Over time my need to use men sexually to feel validated and complete has become less. I am an addict and old patterns die hard, but I find the more I can sit with what I feel and reach out to others, the better chance I have to stay sober today. Because of the recovery process and the people in SCA, I have been able to accept the low self-esteem I feel, turn it over and realize feeling bad does not mean that I am bad. Recovery has allowed me to take the risk to let other men and women have caring feelings for me, and me for them. I am growing to love and accept myself, which opens me to love and allows me to love others. It's a slow process, and all I have to do is show up a moment at a time and be willing to take the next right step.

Characteristic 6

We tried to bring intensity and excitement into our lives through sex, but felt ourselves growing steadily emptier.

Brian B (SF)

I suppose, when I first became sexually active (sometime in college), sex was pure fun, but it quickly became serious business. I couldn't relate to people who were able to go out

for a social evening, maybe even comment in passing on physically attractive people they saw, then go home when it was getting late, and go to bed. I was never so casual about sex; I would ditch my friends early in the evening, claiming "I was tired", so I could devote myself entirely to cruising, without the distraction of having to be sociable. For nearly ten years, I was basically satisfied with oral sex. Then, after a painful break-up with a guy I was dating for a few months, I discovered anal sex. My sexual behavior escalated quickly after that: within a year, I was exploring SM (sadomasochism), engaging in progressively kinkier activities. Each time I tried something new, it was incredibly exciting, at least the first few times. But the novelty would inevitably wear off, and I would have to try something even more extreme to reach the point of oblivion that I craved so intensely. Like a drug addict, I developed *tolerance* to sex, and I had to push the envelope to get the same high. Whenever I tried to stop acting out (and I tried many times over the years), I was always confronted by the same dismay: life seemed unbearably dull without sex. I didn't dislike recovery; the fruits of recovery for me, fellowship, career, nature, spirituality, love, even a relationship, were pleasant enough and fulfilling at times. However, they all seemed poor substitutes to what I was leaving behind. I didn't feel truly alive unless I was in the throes of sex. Sometimes I seriously fantasized about answering one of those "24/7" sex ads, so I could escape completely and devote myself fully to sex for the rest of my life!

How have my attitudes changed in recovery? For one thing, I'm getting used to the idea that sex doesn't have to be fireworks all the time, and that's okay. I used to feel cheated if I didn't see stars every time I had sex. Now, I'm in a relationship, and I'm learning that my partner and I go through periods of greater and lesser sexual intensity; although at times I still "get high" on sex, I realize that I don't need to panic if, at other times, it seems more routine. Occasionally during sex, I even experience feelings of real tenderness and intimacy, totally opposite from the addictive rush that used to be the only point. I've also become a little less rigid and *serious* about the whole thing. Sure, sex can be intense and passionate; but it can also be playful and lighthearted. Finally, I'm enriching my life with non-sexual pursuits, all those activities listed on the "right-hand side of my Plan." I try to take real pleasure in connecting with friends, connecting with my lover, connecting with nature, not *instead* of sex, but in addition to it.

Recovery is about reclaiming the freedom to *choose* my sexual behavior, instead of being driven by it. I used to think that SM was by its very nature pathological, that I couldn't be sober unless I swore off kinky sex. I feel the opposite way today. I don't claim to speak for anyone else, but I have come to the conclusion that I need to accept all of who I am, even, and perhaps especially, my interest in intense sexual expression. Other programs I attempted to follow before SCA encouraged me to deny my sexuality. Suppressing my urges never used to work, because after being abstinent for a period through white-knuckling, sooner or later I would erupt unpredictably in a frenzy of acting out. One of the reasons why I love SCA is that it encourages me to *celebrate* my sexuality, to bring sex back into the fold of the totality of my life. At the same time, I would be kidding myself if I didn't admit that I *miss* the old days, when I could seemingly engage in all the sex I wanted with wild abandon. Although I have filled my life with all sorts of wonderful pursuits, I know that I will never find anything to compete with the experience of acting out, in terms of sheer intensity and excitement. I feel genuine grief over the loss of those days. I think it's important to acknowledge the *grief*, rather than pretend that I

don't feel it. Getting into recovery was like death and rebirth, the death of my old life and the birth of my new one. It's natural to feel grief associated with the death of my former life, even if I am replacing it with something better.

I think that living, for me, is ultimately about seeking a sense of *purpose*, maybe even more than seeking happiness (since having a life that feels purposeful leads to feeling happy). At a critical turning point in my life, I had this horrible vision of acting out till I was too old, weak, or sick to continue doing it, of reviewing my life from my deathbed, regretting all the missed opportunities, realizing that my life had amounted to nothing. I resolved that I didn't want to die that way, and my resolution launched me into long-term sobriety. I still haven't found the meaning of life, but I'm certain addictive sex is not part of it! Exploring the paths to fulfillment is the exciting journey of recovery.

Characteristic 7

Sex was compartmentalized instead of integrated into our lives as a healthy element.
Phideaux X (LA/NY)

Of all the characteristics, number seven is perhaps the one that awakened me to the realization that I was sick. For all my protestations of free-spirit love and sexual experimentation, I could no longer ignore the fact that sex had become a nightly ritual of odd telephone masturbation experiences and personal dares to keep anonymous dates setup through internet or phone line. The sex was mapped out ahead of time, based on fetish, body parts, and particular activities, with no sense of lovemaking or even recognition that another human being was present. In recovery, I realized that I was recreating the dynamics of my childhood molestation. I would concoct situations where I, or the other person, was a purely sexual object. The sex would be about "playing with the toy" that the other person had become. Because of my childhood "incest" (which I define as inappropriate sex between an authority adult and a minor), I subconsciously approached many of my internet/phone encounters with a lot of anger. The sex would be about returning to the scenario of my childhood and acting out anger and rage at the perps. Whoever I found for sex would be a hapless stand in for those figures from my past.

In these ways I compartmentalized sex in my life. No longer was sex about intimate communication with another person; it was a ritual. My previous sexual expressions (making love with someone I was dating, or having sex with a cute partner I was intrigued with) stood in stark contrast to the sex rituals I was committing with my computer/phone sex dates. Inside my heart I hated these demoralizing encounters. I subjected myself to sex with people I despised because it was no longer about attraction or eroticism. I detached my mind so I could go through motions until I'd completed the ritual and was thus released to return to my life.

In recovery, I've seen how certain guidelines can keep me in touch with my sexual partner and myself so that my sex remains a connected collaboration with another human being. I've been told to refrain from too many fantasies and to stay in the moment. It's even been suggested that I invite God to participate in my encounters.

Characteristic 8

We became addicted to people, and were unable to distinguish among sex, love and affection

Michael R (LA)

This is like a two part characteristic for me. The first part is easy for me so see in myself: We became addicted to people. I can become hooked on someone so quickly, I am unsure of what their name is, but I am convinced that I will spend the rest of my life with what's his name. Being addicted to someone brings up a lot of codependency issues and I am not proud of the amount of guys I have stalked or called relentlessly on the telephone because I needed the fix. I wish I could say that these obsessions have been lifted now that I have over three years on my plan, but it is something I still struggle with. The difference today is that when I feel like this I can make a choice to either act out my feelings of disappointment or I can call a program friend and gain support to take the high road, and stop taking out my feelings on others. In a sense, I can choose whether I want my feelings to lash out at someone and seriously compromise my serenity/sobriety. The decision seems obvious to a normy but it is something I still struggle with.

The second part of this characteristic is a bit more tricky and subtle for me. I have a big problem with distinguishing between sex, love, and affection. After all those years of acting out my discernment has been greatly impaired. These three things are so important and kind of blend one into another, that it is hard to find the line that separates them. If I am in love with someone, sex and affection are present as well that's pretty obvious. But most of my history has dealt with having sex with someone and trying to find the love and affection when in fact, we were just using each other. The tool of dating really helps me figure things out before making a sexual decision. Recently, I met a guy online and we clicked sexually and we met for coffee and I was very sexually interested in him, but the more time we spent together I realized that we had nothing in common other than what we liked to do sexually. After seeing him a couple of times I could have had sex with him and it would have been okay on my plan, but that's not what I want in my new life of recovery. Using people and being used is not tolerable for me anymore. So I ended the dating or rather the appointments, prior to sex. This would not have been possible without the support of the people in the program and an understanding of the characteristics. Sex, love and affection are like the legs of a stool, all three must be strong to support the weight of this intimacy seeking addict.

Characteristic 9

We searched for some "magical" quality in others to make us feel complete. Other people were idealized and endowed with a powerful symbolism, which often disappeared after we had sex with them.

David D (Milwaukee)

For me, the key word of the Ninth Characteristic is "magical". What is this magical quality I search for in others? And I must say, I search for this magical characteristic not only in sexual or romantic partners, but in friends, co-workers, and family. And it doesn't disappear only after I have had sex with someone; it disappears when I get to know

someone beyond a superficial level. I think that magical is the perfect word for this quality, because magic is a practice that depends on illusion: the magician doesn't make things disappear; he creates the illusion of making something disappear. So much of my addiction is driven by illusion. The more I am in my addiction, the less I see the world as it really is, and the more I see the world as I want or hope it to be. The more I am in my addiction, the less I see a potential lover or friend as he or she really is, and the more I see them as a fabrication of my desires, an illusion. My guess is that we all harbor images of the ideal lover, the ideal friend. I know I do. And when I meet someone new, I imagine that he or she will live up to this ideal; actually, as an addict, I don't even imagine I know. I cast my new friend or lover in the role of my idealized image. And it is only a matter of time before I, often painfully, see the disparity between reality and my illusion.

I have heard other sex-romance addicts talk about The Chase, The Conquest. They say that they are addicted to the process of acquiring a new lover, and that when they have won the chase, they're bored and want to move on to another chase, abandoning the person they've just "acquired". I can't help but feel that this chase is driven by illusion. I know for me it is. Whether I see someone as an imaginary ideal or as some "trophy" to win, I know I am not seeing this person as a human being. And the truth is that he or she is a living, breathing human being, with flaws and gifts, and an intricate, complex history. Once I've gotten to the point of having sex with this person, I usually am forced to see that he or she doesn't, and in no way could, live up to my imaginary ideal. And like any good addict, I often bail.

So how do I address this characteristic in myself? I work a comprehensive recovery program, trying to use all the tools. Specifically, I know that reaching out to fellow addicts and getting to know them as living, breathing human beings is valuable for me. Hearing other addicts talk openly and honestly about their lives at meetings is a powerful way for me to see people as they really are, not as illusions. I also engage in Zen Buddhist meditation, a practice that asks me to let my thoughts come and go, recognizing that these thoughts are secretions of my own mind and not necessarily reality. In any event, there is certainly no "quick fix". My recovery is a moment by moment process of nurturing a willingness to let go of my illusions and see life as it really is.

Characteristic 10,

We were drawn to people who were not available to us, or who reject or abuse us.

John F (NY)

My history is full of loss, abandonment and rejection, a story I hear over and over again in the rooms of SCA. The pattern began early. My parents were unavailable - my father a daily drinker, my mother focused on his alcoholic behavior. My mother died when I was 9, leaving me feeling terrified and alone with a crazy parent. The situation at home spiraled quickly down, leaving me in a house with no adults, heat, phone or electricity by the time I was 11.

When I discovered sex, all those problems seemed to vanish. Anonymity provided its own cloak of safety. I didn't have to connect on any mental or emotional level with these strangers. Real people were far too scary. Even at school, where I developed a crush on

another boy, I was terrified of interacting with him in any real way. I carried on conversations with him in my head, never face to face. Again, I felt safe.

But this sexual compulsion and romantic obsession took up more and more of my time and energy. Eventually I was spending five or more hours every day either looking for sex, having sex, or obsessing about sex or romance. It got worse in college, where I went from straight A's to almost flunking out.

After college I met a man and we immediately moved in together. I thought having a lover would cure me; instead, this was the beginning of a 15-year relationship that was characterized by verbal abuse, rejection and unavailability. And I never stopped my sexual acting out with strangers. Three weeks was the longest I ever went before "the trance" would take over and I'd head for an acting-out place.

When I reached SCA at age 37, I had a deeply ingrained pattern of attraction to people who were unavailable or who would reject or abuse me. This pattern was one I could not change on my own, even when I became aware of it.

Instead, I started going to meetings and working the Steps with a caring sponsor. My relationship with my sponsor was the first I had experienced in decades where I felt unconditional support. He was not available all the time; he set limits, for instance, on when I could phone him. Yet when he was available, he was fully present, a situation I found overwhelming until I worked the first three Steps and accepted love into my life.

As I continued to work the Steps, I saw in Step Four how I had a role in my relationships. I felt safe with people who were unavailable because they would not abuse me. Rejection allowed me to feel angry, which I could then turn inward and use to justify my acting out. Abusive relationships were familiar; in fact, they were the basis of my family. All these contributed to my addictive behavior, which in turn led to these types of relationships. The vicious circle of addiction.

When I did my Fifth Step with my sponsor, I felt almost overwhelmed again at the love and acceptance I experienced in return. I realized there was still far to go, but now I was integrating a Higher Power into my life who would guide me. Step Six gave me the willingness to proceed, and Step Seven saw the gradual removal of my character defects, a miraculous transformation of them into character strengths. And so it goes. I look forward to additional work on Steps Eight through Twelve, which I believe will allow me to further integrate the love of others outside SCA into my life, and mine into theirs. These relationships are based on love and giving, not addiction and selfishness.

Today I see the Characteristics in one way as the SCA Promises. The 10th Characteristic says "we were drawn", not "we are drawn". Yes, it is true that I was drawn to those people. And now, through the grace of my Higher Power, on my good days I am no longer drawn to people who are unavailable to me. I am no longer drawn to people who reject or abuse me. And on those days when I am feeling down and still drawn to those people, I have the gift of sobriety, which tells me that I no longer have to act on those feelings.

Characteristic 11

We feared relationships, but continually searched for them. In a relationship we feared abandonment and rejection, but out of one, we felt empty and incomplete.

Aaron L (NY)

My first relationship was based on need and not love. I felt that my partner would be the only person who would ever want me. My self-esteem was nonexistent since I hadn't gotten sober yet and I searched desperately for a relationship to cure that. But my desperation kept people away. The first person that expressed an interest in me, I immediately jumped into a relationship with him without stopping to think whether I even liked this person, let alone whether I wanted to move in with him, which I did several weeks after we met. Although I was aware of his destructive neurosis and constant need for control, I dealt with it not through communication, but through resentments, petty fights, and various other means of destroying the relationship. This included infidelity and lying, things that I feared most that he would do to me. Although I craved being with someone, most of the time we were together I would be thinking about ways to get away from him. Having an unfounded fear of being smothered has stayed with me through most of my adult relationships.

After my first lover met someone that could give him more attention than I could, he asked me to move out. This prompted a steady flow of serial non-monogamy after I got sober from alcohol and my self-esteem was regained. I learned that he wasn't the only person would be interested in me. Then, it seemed like I had to find as many people as possible who were. My ego had an insatiable appetite for gratification and attention and I found myself constantly on the prowl. But what was I looking for; sex, friendship, a relationship, or just attention? To this day, I often can't differentiate between these things. I find that now, if I meet someone with whom I enter into either a serious or casual relationship, I can almost count the months before I'll want to end it and move on to someone else as soon as things start to get difficult. But during those first few months, I'm in constant fear of losing the person, thinking that they will either:

- 1) find out something about me that they won't like,
- 2) that I'll say and do something that will upset them, or
- 3) that they'll realize that I'm just not good enough, because I don't make enough money, have the right kind of job, etc.

I used to feel completely alone if I wasn't dating someone. The hunt to meet someone often would turn into a frenzy where my life priorities would be out of wack. The instant gratification of a chance meeting with a stranger might be exciting, but that thrill would wear off quickly. When I substitute that for spending time with people who are important in my life, that's when I feel lonelier than ever.

Now, I realize that sometimes when I'm feeling isolated, what doesn't help me feel better is to prowl the streets in search of a romantic partner, long-term or otherwise. Those times are when I especially need to spend time with friends, work on career-oriented projects, or go to meetings. These are where the opportunities to meet quality people come into my life and are what keep me most fulfilled.

Characteristic 12

While constantly seeking intimacy with another person, we found that the desperate quality of our need made true intimacy with anyone impossible, and we often developed unhealthy dependency relationships that eventually became unbearable.

David A-S (NY)

Five months ago I began to chat with a guy on line. Two months ago we finally met. Our connection was so intense, so passionate, so mutual and so complete it was hard to believe such a thing was possible. The sex we had clocked in at 150% presence on both our parts. We knew exactly what the other wanted and could give it completely unconditionally. For the first time I felt no guilt, shame or remorse after sex. It was an utterly fulfilling and transcendent experience. What was even more amazing was that after sex we wanted to stay together, talk, go for a walk have a meal together. This felt like everything I had always hoped a relationship could be. What's wrong with this picture?

In spite of the intense and total connection I felt, I still had my old familiar feelings of impending eschatological loss and despair, every time we separated. ("Every time you go away, you take a piece of me with you"). I would begin to think it was all over, that I just imagined what had happened between us and that it couldn't possibly go on at any rate. Invariably, I got indications from him that nothing like that is going on for him and that it is all just happening in my mind.

Fortunately I didn't, (as I have in the past), bring these feelings of desperate longing and inexplicable impending loss to him. I bring them to my sponsor and to friends in the program who are able to see through my historical feelings for me and bring me back into the present. They remind me that my feelings are not facts, that there is no basis for my feelings, given what happened between him and I, etc. Thank goodness, for these other eyes, thoughts and feelings that come to me from my program friends. With the help of my sponsor and my friends in program, I am able to have these awful historical/hysterical feelings and not act on them. I can't stop the feelings but I can choose how I respond to them. One day at a time, I am granted a reprieve from falling into the abyss of my desperate dependency with my friends and sponsor acting as a net for me. Yes, I call this the net gain of the Program! (Yes, I know....puke!).

There is no guarantee that this liaison will go anywhere beyond a few months (in spite of the usual past life recalls, cosmic visions, very favourable astrological compatibility castings, paintings, and sonnets plotting the probable trajectory of this obviously meant-to-be union). However, in spite of my hysterical feelings and my inclination to fall apart here and there, I manage to continue to hold myself together and function in a healthy way, almost as if I were not prone to debilitating emotional arrest at any moment. While I am still inclined to fall into unhealthy dependency relationships, I know now what steps to take to extract myself from the unbearable parts so that I can have a relatively sane and healthy experience. This is like being able to walk, when I had previously experienced myself only ever able to move in a wheel chair. I have a lot to be grateful for but nothing yet to be absolutely certain of. Damn!

Characteristic 13

Even when we got the love of another person, it never seemed enough, and we were unable to stop lusting after others.

Paul N (Milwaukee)

The thirteenth characteristic is one example of paradox in addiction and recovery. The love that is often the goal of a sex addict is achieved. The pink cloud or honeymoon phase begins. One day, six months, a year, how long are we given? Sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly, the cracks begin to grow. The sex addict can have many thoughts that are addictive and we can use these thoughts to rationalize our behavior. Such as...is this love truly "the one", is it too soon to settle down, I bet he/she is looking around. The big book of AA calls this the cunning, baffling and powerful aspect of addiction. Triggers can seem to begin to heighten. Someone smiles at you. A complement is paid. Or you just notice someone who has that "look" that you search for. The paradox is that this can all happen at the same time that we have intense feelings of love for our current partner. These thoughts and feelings can co-exist in the same space. This is not a question of lack of love or strength of commitment. This is addiction. The conflict of our love for a current partner and a lust/romance for a new partner can be immobilizing, depressing, and at times cause the sex addict to question his/her sanity. Guilt and shame even if the addict does not act on this lust is possible. I've heard this described as "mental adultery". The fantasy or sexualizing that can occur in an addict's mind while he/she is in a relationship. This can be as damaging as physically act on their fantasies or urges. It removes him/her from the moment and he/she lives in the mentally isolating world of his/her addiction. Sometimes the sex addict may begin to resent his/her current partner. He/she can begin to be angry and act irrational without knowing it. A cycle of resenting the current partner for getting in the way of new sexual conquests, and love and commitment to the current partner as a salvation from addiction can begin. Both the resentment and the yearning for salvation are examples of how the addict does not deal with day to day experiences. If this cycle goes on, it can lead to separation without either one knowing quite why it happened. SCA allows the addict a safe place to share these thoughts with others who have been through it or are in it. The addict is no longer alone with just his/her thoughts. By staying honest with a sponsor or at meetings it is possible for the cycle of resentment/salvation to be broken. Addicts need other addicts to recover. Often these are the only people we can open up to about our thoughts and actions. Because we know they understand on a fundamental level where others, including at times our partners, do not. Meditation and literature can also get us out of our thoughts and into a more serene space, so we are more open to guidance from a power greater than ourselves. Like most characteristics of sex addiction, there is a chance this may never be fully lifted from the addict. The SCA program helps us understand the paradox within the thirteenth characteristic, and allows us the choice of staying in today and making the choices that lead us to serenity.

Characteristic 14

Trying to conceal our dependency demands, we grew more isolated from ourselves, from God and from the very people we longed to be close to.

Marc N (NY)

The attitude I have when I am active in my addiction is characterized by quotes like: "I'm attracted to you, but I don't need anybody". "I am single and looking, but I'm only used to perfection in others". "You may think that I am interested in you and want to pursue a relationship, but don't give me any reason to reject you or I'm out the door faster than you can say 'intimacy issues'".

Then, I'm back in that lonely place, full of self-pity. Poor me. I'm such a catch, why doesn't anybody (that I like romantically) seem to recognize it? Don't they know that I'm a loving, caring person - capable of great gentleness and compassion? If only other people were different, then I'd be happy. I'm just a victim of the all the negative circumstances of my life. God is the ultimate conspiracy theorist - placing these difficult people and situations before me so I have to continue to suffer. And on and on - the point being that this is the voice of my denial. It's like an old pair of jeans that fit so well I hate to give them up. But what option do I have? I am not ready to admit that I'm powerless over the addiction. I will do it my way.

But the yearning doesn't go away. Well, if crumbs are all that I am destined to get, then I will build my house on the incredible shrinking foundation that an attitude of self-will offers. I will avoid the pain of acknowledging my need for meaningful human contact and seduce men at the gym or the park. When this isn't enough, I can just pay for sex, and there is always the escape into the world of pornography lying just next to my bed. My big secret stash... no one need ever know...

And one day I get honest. I'm not really desperate, but I'm acting like I am. I see myself chasing some elusive idea of happiness - begging for love that's continually out of reach. What about me, I don't want to be left behind! I have all the material things that are supposed to make me happy. But I can't control people to love me. I'm tired of manipulating men through sex and then rejecting them because I can't believe that they really care about me. Or I believe they will hurt me if I let them get too close. My insides are in turmoil and certainly don't match my outside. Worst of all, I can't control my own compulsive behavior. I have hit a bottom.

I have become willing to explore another way. It a big jump for my recovery when I go to a meeting and feel human enough to share. Just maybe this is a safe place where people will accept me and won't judge me. I can be vulnerable to the room because I hear others doing it. At first, I have to avoid direct eye contact and leave right after the Serenity Prayer. But, eventually I can rely on this fellowship, and even later I can feel better just knowing that I'm on my way to a meeting that I attend regularly. In the circle of SCA, I'm known and acknowledged. I am going to be okay. I am strong enough to look inward, to ask for help. I can be the parent I never had, I can hold myself through the loneliness and despair during withdrawal from the addiction. I am able to accept the reassurances of others. I am ready to start acting from a place of hope.

The Characteristics, what comes next?

Richard K (LA)

Through the concepts of the Program and the guidance of our Higher Power, we've been able to let go of the more serious aspects of our addiction, being in places or with people that reinforced our addiction; debasing ourselves with activities which only added to the shame that had been imposed upon us in our earlier years; equating sex, anonymous or otherwise, with intimacy while being terrified when any sign of true intimacy came on the scene. Yes, we now have a pretty good handle on these things and we've gotten at least some feeling of what recovery is.

But for many of us, there's an "emptiness" left. There's still something missing in our lives. For many of us, sexual fantasies still loom heavily in our minds far too often for our own good. We might not actually be engaging in sexual activities which are harmful for us, but we're sure thinking about them. For many of us that might be thinking about the "old days" of our acting out and embellishing those episodes with "hot stuff we could have done" to make them all the more exciting. Or we might fixate on those great legs that this guy at the gym has; or the way that number walks and carries himself...

For some of us, true intimacy, being vulnerable, feeling and acknowledging our real feelings and talking about them, as well as physical closeness without sex, has manifested from time to time and we feel horribly uncomfortable with it. So uncomfortable at times that we might totally shut it out, freeze up to "defend ourselves" from it; push ourselves away from it. And sex loving, intimate sex with someone we know well and have deep feelings for - many of us don't even have a clue of what that might be. We've read books and seen movies about "romantic" sex, but somehow we can't see that happening with us. In fact, many of us fear any kind of sex, except perhaps sex with ourselves and our fantasies, for fear of going back to our acting out patterns, or for fear of what is UNKNOWN to us.

So, we've stopped acting out; we're into "recovery", yet there's this void that we can't seem to fill. We are certainly sexual beings, God gave us that attribute and we have every right to have it, but somehow that got so screwed up in our lives that healthy sexuality doesn't seem to compute for us. We keep going to our meetings and hear our brothers and sisters expressing many of these same feelings, or perhaps relating how they've slipped, or maybe talking about having intimate sexual experiences which later turned sour out of fear or for whatever reason. And, occasionally, we hear a warm story of a member actually accomplishing an intimate, happy life with another being which includes sex as an integrated element rather than a debilitating addictive fixation or obsession.

But so many of us are still stuck, or so it seems and feels. There are times when we wonder if we'd be better off going back to our old patterns. Yet we know deep down that we can't do that and live; that voice inside each of us that we've learned to listen to keeps telling us that and we can no longer stifle it as we used to. Some of us try to reconcile celibacy with our lives, but that horniness keeps coming through, whether it's our God-

given sexuality or our addiction, and we're not so sure that would work either, and it certainly doesn't sound like much fun. So now what?

The "now what" is going to be different for each one of us, and there's no cook book answer available. We seem to sense that we just can't sit back and let God, our Higher Power, do it for us, without much effort on our part. Things just don't work that way. We're going to have to work and work hard and it will take time, a lot of it; something a compulsive has a hard time dealing with, and a lot of effort. But work on, or at, or with what? In what way?

The Program and therapy and books and church and all that are certainly helpful in trying to sort out all this, but they can only go so far. The answer seems to lie in that Presence, or Being, or Power that many call God, however we and they might understand God. That Presence is always with us, whether we acknowledge It or not, ready to guide us to the choices that are healthy for us. It's up to us to sort these choices out and surrender to and follow that guidance, or go on our own way bumbling at times, hopefully learning from each mistake we might make. Somehow we know deep inside that, as we slowly let go of our own egos and let ourselves listen to that Presence, we will be making the "right" choices for ourselves and get ourselves back on the path to a rich, loving, serene, abundant life, including a healthy sexuality.

Nebulous? Yes! Absolutely! But that's the way things seem to work. We've tried it our way, and we all know how that turned out. Now it may just be the right time to try God's way. Let's give it a try. The only thing we have to lose is our misery.





SCA New York Retreats

WHEN: August 4-6, 2000 -- New York retreat (Steps 10, 11, 12)
January 26-28, 2001 -- New York retreat (tentative - Steps 1, 2, 3)
August 10-12, 2001 -- New York retreat (tentative - Steps 4, 5, 6)

WHERE: Holiday Hills Conference Center, Pawling, N.Y.

COST*: \$175.00 includes air-conditioned room (double room) and board,
Friday's dinner through Sunday's lunch.
(The supplemental charge for a single room is \$45.00.)

*Cost is estimated. Please verify in advance. Costs are expected to rise
slightly for the 2001 retreats.

TO REGISTER, WRITE TO: :retreat-ny@sca-recovery.org

Come join us for a weekend of fellowship, workshops, meetings, meditation, and communing with nature. Holiday Hills is located on a beautiful mountain lake. The conference center is accessible by Metro North's Harlem Line from Grand Central Station; free transportation from the station is provided. Complete travel instructions will be provided with confirmation of your reservation. Facilities include a fitness center, tennis courts and jogging and walking trails.

SCA RADIO PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

SCA Radio PSA kits are now available. The kit contains a pre-recorded audio tape and script for a 30-second and a 60-second radio spot about sexual compulsion and how to get in touch with SCA. A step by step instruction sheet on getting the spots aired by local stations is included with each kit. This sheet also explains how to alert the 800-number volunteers of any additional information you might want to have passed on to people seeking help in your area. The kits cost \$12 for the first and \$10 for each additional kit. Order a kit for each station you hope to have air the spots. Make checks payable to:

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The SCAnner is YOUR Newsletter.

The SCAnner is published twice a year (in the summer and in the winter), by ISO, the International Service Organization of SCA. It is meant to serve as a forum for SCA members, who want to share their experience, strength and hope with the rest of the fellowship, particularly those members who may be isolated and can not reach a meeting easily or regularly. Your contributions and comments are greatly encouraged, and always sincerely invited. Please send your contributions to:

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